

Sunday, August 30, 2009

**FIRST READING: Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–9**

*The Israelites believed the law was a divine gift that provided guidelines for living out the covenant. Moses commands the people to obey the law and neither to add to nor subtract from it. The Israelites are also to teach the law to their children and their children's children.*

So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. <sup>2</sup>You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the LORD your God with which I am charging you. <sup>6</sup>You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!" <sup>7</sup>For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him? <sup>8</sup>And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?

<sup>9</sup>But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children.

# The Start of Something Great

(The Rev. Daniel J. Krewson  
Calvary Lutheran Church  
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Who here has eaten at the restaurant - Buca Di Beppo???

Our family went there recently and were delighted by the experience.

When we arrived, we were invited to walking through the kitchen –

The chefs were friendly and waving to our children

There was a booth in there!

A Couple was sitting there, celebrating their anniversary.

The smells and the sights were wonderful – and created a sense of anticipation for our meal.

When we were finally seated, I thought

This could be the start of a great meal.

And it was – the friendliness of the chefs was  
matched by the flavorful food they prepared...

I mention that experience today, because it reminds us of the importance of anticipation and the excitement of participating in something great.

The text for today's sermon is taken from the OT

The first reading – from Duet

A text when people of God were wandering in the wilderness for forty years...

Of course, this was before there were GPS systems and Mapquest...

Although sometimes, they don't help either.

While following Moses through the desert,

They were being instructed by God.

They were being formed and schooled by the Spirit of the Lord.

It was a time of preparation to inherit a land

While in Egypt, what held them together was the bondage of slavery and the cruelty of Pharaoh.

What would hold them together as a people in the future?

The mercy of God and words and commands of God.

So the time of wandering was a time to focus on the written word – the ordinances and statutes.

These laws were to be what distinguished them as a people

Text suggests – that this was the start of something great....

The theological center of the passage appears in verses seven and eight. Note the parallel structure in the following rhetorical questions:

- *What great nation is there that has gods near to it like the LORD our God? (verse 7)*
- *What great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances righteous as all this law? (verse 8)*

*The Israelites believed they had received a divined gift in the words of the law  
The statutes and ordinances –  
It was a divine gift and guiding principle for life*

*The Israelites are also to teach the law to their children and their children's children.*

As Christians, when we hear this text, it calls to mind the echoes of what Jesus said –to His followers as they were sent forth in his name:

Matthew 28:20 Jesus said – baptize in my name, and teach all nations to obey everything that I have commanded you.

We, like the Israelites in this passage from Duet.

Believe we have received a divine gift –

The word of grace through Jesus Christ,

The gifts of the Spirit...

And we are to teach in His name as we share His love

This emphasis on teaching is where we find ourselves in our society at this time.

Many public schools start tomorrow.

This weekend was move in time for the University.

So I ask the question:

Do you view the coming school year as the start of something great?!!!

Perhaps that depends on whether or not you are a weary parent eager for classes to begin again!!

What about you students?

Is tomorrow the start of something great?

[9:15 & 1045 German tradition...]

I was intrigued by a German tradition surrounding the 1<sup>st</sup> day of 1<sup>st</sup> grace.

It is a rite of passage that has a phrase associated with it:

“Der Ernst des Lebens hat begonnen” (“The seriousness of life has begun”)

It's a huge affair:

Grandparents, godparents, cousins, aunts and uncles, friends and neighbors

There is a special worship service at the Lutheran church

A special assembly at school

The children receive

special school cones – filled with simples gifts and treats

After school day over, the celebration is just beginning

Families host parties that rival our graduation parties

I think it is a great way to mark the beginning of a journey

Recognition that this is the start of something great...

BUT...what about those who aren't attending classes any longer – what about you?

Is today the start of something great?

Or this week – or this new month?

If not – why?

I contend that those in relationship with Jesus Christ can look the start of the school year  
Or the start of anything new – a move  
A new relationship  
A new direction  
And say – this can be the start of something great

Because WE HAVE A GOD WHO IS SO NEAR TO US!!!!

Perhaps this morning's text from Deuteronomy challenges us to

See past the same old same old  
And be open to the great things God has in store for us...

It's hard, though, sometimes to see past the daily grind...

Makes me think of the story about Little Johnny,

Summer vacation was over and Little Johnny returned back to school.

Only two days later his teacher phoned his mother to tell her that he was misbehaving.

"Wait a minute," the mother said to the teacher over the phone. "I had Johnny with me for three months and I never called you once when he misbehaved!"

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Or I think of the Physics Teacher: who full of enthusiasm said "Isaac Newton was sitting under a tree when an apple fell on his head and he discovered gravity. Isn't that wonderful, class?"

A sarcastic student, perhaps suffering from early onset of Senioritis retorted: "Yes ma'am, if Sir Isaac Newton had been sitting in class looking at books like us, he wouldn't have discovered anything."

Christina Rossetti the poet had it right when she said:

There are two kinds of people in the world  
Those who thank God for putting roses between the thorns  
Those who curse God for putting thorns between the roses

How does your faith affect the way you see the world

Is this the start of something great???

And I don't think it's just a matter of us being optimistic

I admit – the start of something great often comes out of a rough place or a difficult situation  
Or our own brokenness

Take for example this experience...

Weeks ago I had much to accomplish on my to do list – I wanted to get to work at certain time and had prioritized my list the night before and had a

Plan to leave by 9:00 am

That morning, I was helping get children ready which included

Trying to get a 2 year old to brush his teeth

Good luck setting a schedule around that!

Left later than wanted, frustrated, feeling incompetent

As I drove to work, I was able to reflect:

What is that about?

Why the anger?

Why the frustration?

Felt out of control and lacking in parenting skills

Basically a feeling of brokenness in myself.

Fortunately, God was able to turn that around for me that day

God accomplished that, through a co-worker

In talking about our day – I shared my silly frustration...

It opened up opportunity for this person to share about the difficulty

Of caring, not for a toddler

but for a frail elderly parent who is living with her family

The frustration – the tantrums, if one can call it that for 80 year old

And there we were, consoling and comforting one another...

The start of something great happens when we acknowledge our own shortcomings

When we own our feelings of inadequacy

And then come into the presence of One who says

I know. I know. You are not always what you hoped you'd be.

**BUT YOU'RE STILL MINE...**

That is what God says to us...

**YOU ARE STILL MINE.**

I believe God's grace can take us as we are and make something great of us...

Who knew that Ted Kennedy

Destined to become the third longest serving senator in US history,

would at the age of 19, get caught cheating on an exam while a student at Harvard?

He would leave the institution to enroll in the military for 16 months.

He then re-enrolled at Harvard and graduated to move on to UVA Law School,

And went on to an illustrious career...

Perhaps you've heard the well worn phrase:

Failure isn't in the falling down.

Failure is in the staying down.

To keep at it, by God's grace,

is what makes this day the potential start date of something great.

Reminds me of what one educator pointed out recently

That anything great in life takes perseverance and patience.

Take for example what Michael Angelo once said about a piece of his artwork:

I saw the angel in the marble, and I carved, until I set him free.

What the ancient Israelites saw in the ordinances and statutes

And in the 10 Commandments was the word of God  
literally carved in stone

It was for them a reminder of how near God is

A pathway that leads to the Master's Peace.

A light unto the nations.

The start of something great

Won't you go back to school with me, and with them?

Not to the school made of bricks and mortar

But the one of the heart  
where the great Rabbi Jesus beckons to each

Follow me – and I shall give you rest...

And now to Him who is able to accomplish abundantly beyond all we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory,  
now and forever. Amen.